DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 434 369 CS 510 123

AUTHOR Gustafson, Robert L.; Thomsen, Steven R.; Popovich, Mark N.
TITLE Perceptions of Harmful Female Advertising Stereotypes and Eating-Disordered Thinking among Female College Students: A Q Method Analysis.
PUB DATE 1999-08-00
NOTE 26p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (82nd, New Orleans, LA, August 4-7, 1999).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Advertising; *Characterization; Eating Disorders; *Females; Higher Education; Mass Media Effects; Media Research; Q Methodology; *Sex Stereotypes; *Student Attitudes; *Undergraduate Students

ABSTRACT

A study employed Q methodology, personal interviews, and a self-administered questionnaire to explore how female college students, a population segment with one of the highest incidences of anorexia nervosa and other eating disorders, rank magazine advertisements that feature a variety of potentially harmful female stereotypes. Specifically, the study examined how ads that feature stereotypes promoting the "thin ideal" rank in comparison to other harmful stereotypes. Findings suggest that women are accustomed to seeing ultra-thin fashion models, and they do not readily perceive the danger in this stereotypical portrayal of beauty and success. Contains 49 references and 4 tables of data; an appendix contains categories of potentially harmful female stereotypes used in advertising, magazine advertisements featuring female stereotypes, and descriptions and ad descriptions and typal Z-scores.) (RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 434 369

Perceptions of Harmful Female Advertising Stereotypes and Eating-Disordered Thinking among Female College Students: a Q Method Analysis

Robert L. Gustafson
Department of Journalism
College of Communication, Information, and Media
Ball State University
Muncie, IN 47306
765.285.8737
00rlgustafso@bsuvc.bsu.edu

Steven R.Thomsen, Ph.D.
Department of Communication
Brigham Young University

Mark N. Popovich, Ph.D.
Department of Journalism
Ball State University

Note: All authors contributed equally to this study.
The authors wish to thank graduate student Renee Suhrheinrich for her assistance.

Presented
~~Submitted~~ to:
Association for Education in Journalism & Mass Communication
Advertising Division
Professional Freedom & Responsibility
New Orleans, 1999

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
R. Gustafson
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CS 510 123

Abstract

This study employs Q methodology, personal interviews and a self-administered questionnaire to explore how female college students, a population segment with one of the highest incidences of anorexia nervosa and other eating disorders, rank magazine advertisements that feature a variety of potentially harmful female stereotypes. Specifically, the study examines how ads that feature stereotypes promoting the "thin ideal" rank in comparison to other harmful stereotypes. The findings are compared to measures of the subjects' anorectic cognitions, body anxiety and dieting behavior.

Introduction

During the past century, advertisers have used a wide variety of female stereotypes in order to sell their wares. A review of the relevant literature (Courtney & Lockeretz, 1971; Millum, 1975; Courtney & Whipple, 1983; Ferguson, Kershel & Trinkham, 1990; Zimmerman, 1997), and contemporary magazine advertisements reveals numerous female stereotypes are still in use today, and many of these stereotypes are believed to be psychologically and physiologically harmful. While some observers (Solomon, 1992; Givens, 1993; Jaffe & Berger, 1994) note that progress has been made in eliminating some of the more traditional female stereotypes used in advertising, it seems changes in our society and women's lifestyles have only produced a new set of negative stereotypes.

These harmful female stereotypes can take many forms and portray women as dumb blondes, halfwits, indecisive, child-like, frivolous, dingalings, obssessed with men, submissive to men, a simple housewife, a superwoman, sexual objects, overly concerned with appearance, beautifully/successfully slim, dieting for a waif-look and sexual prowess, or other stereotypes referred to later in this paper. While all of these stereotypes can be offensive and demeaning, none is more danagerous than the one that promotes the "thin ideal." The stereotypical portrayal that

suggests that super-slim women are more fashionable, desirable and successful can contribute to eating disorders that can kill.

For over a century, newspapers and magazines have been deluging Americans with images of ideal beauty. From the early to mid-1800s, the full feminine figure was considered attractive. The slimmer, more athletic Gibson Girl, created by artist Charles Dana Gibson, replaced it as the ideal body shape in the 1890s, and thinness has remained the body ideal ever since. Our idea of thinness, of course, has changed over time. According to *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1905, the Gibson Girl had average measurements of 38-27-45 (Zimmerman, 1997). Today's Barbie Doll's measurements extrapolate to a woman, 38-18-28, which is an unattainable role model (Teleford, 1997). A number of content analyses have reported that models and centerfolds have become less "curvaceous" over the past several decades, suggesting that a thinner "ideal" is being presented to women (Garner, Garfinkel, Schwartz & Thompson, 1990; Silverstein, et al., 1986; Czajka-Narins & Parham, 1990).

Female role models in advertising have evolved from the Breck girl with her wholesome appeal to nymphets and groups of androgynous people, who look like they are coming down from a heroin high. These images go beyond merely selling the sponsoring brand; they can affect the self-image, self-esteem and even the physical and emotional health of women. A Columbia University Journalism study found that "most American women probably come away from a quick perusal of their favorite magazine with some conflicting, ultimately disturbing images"(Teleford, 1997).

The mass media have been identified as one of the most influential sociocultural factors in the etiology of anorexia nervosa (Myers & Biocca, 1992; Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson & Kelly, 1986; Harrison & Cantor, 1997). A growing body of research has linked the readership of women's beauty, fashion and fitness magazines with eating-disordered thinking, body dissatisfaction, and an obsessive drive for thinness, particularly among college-age women (see for example, Harrison & Cantor, 1997). Yet, "few studies have examined the mechanisms by which advertising may contribute to eating disorders" (Faber & Wright-Isak, 1997).

The purpose of this study is to explore how college-age women, a population segment with one of the highest incidences of anorexia nervosa and other eating disorders, rank advertisements

that feature a variety of harmful female stereotypes using a Q Method bipolar scale. Specifically, the study examines how ads that feature stereotypes promoting slimness and dieting rank in comparison to other harmful female stereotypes. These results are then compared to measures of the subjects' body anxiety, anorectic cognitions and dieting behavior. In so doing, we hope to provide additional insights into how women perceive female stereoptypes in advertising and how this contributes to the etiology of anorexia nervosa.

Relevant Literature

Anorexia nervosa has been characterized as a biopsychosocial disorder resulting in distortions in self-image and self-perception that lead a substantial number of women to develop an intense fear of food and weight gain to the point that many literally starve themselves to death.

Dieting has been identified as a percursor to the development of most eating disorders, including anorexia nervosa (Smolak & Stiegel-Moore, 1996; Connors, 1996; Levine, Smolak & Hayden, 1994). Dieting has become so commonplace among adolescent and college-age women that researchers must distinguish between "normative" dieting practices and "maladaptive" dieting and eating (Polivy & Herman, 1987). Estimates are that as many as 40 to 60 percent of all high school girls are on a diet and significant numbers of pre-adolescent and elementary-age school girls are frequent dieters (Smolak & Striegel-Moore, 1996; American School Health Association, 1989; Wadden et al., 1991).

Recent research has identified a number of social, cultural, familial, and biological forces that, when combined with the presence of maladaptive eating practices, can contibute to the pathogenesis of anorexia nervosa, which may affect as many as 4 percent to 22 percent of all college age women (Harrison & Cantor, 1997; Connors, 1996). A growing number of scholars have suggested that the mass media may be an important sociocultural force in the cultivation of unrealistic standards of beauty and the development of eating disorders (Levine & Smolak, 1996; Stice, Schupak-Neuberg, Shaw & Stein, 1994, Siverstein, Perdue, Peterson & Kelly, 1986; Harrison & Cantor, 1997). The media inundates women with a steady stream of messages, both visual and editorial, that suggest to be attractive and successful one must be "ultra-slender." This emphasis on appearance is believed to lead many women to internalize an unrealistic and

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

unattainable thin "ideal-body stereotype." This, in turn, leads to the development of body size dissatisfaction and, potentially, to eating disorder symptomatology (Myers & Biocca, 1992; Stice, et al., 1994).

The direct impact of seeing thin models may not be the only way advertising unintentionally contributes to the development of eating disorders. Advertising uses a broad array of female stereotypes, sometimes portraying women as dumb blondes and halfwits, sexual objects, and, to the other extreme, as superwomen who have the ability to be successful in numerous roles. As alternative stereotypes are portrayed as acceptable or desirable, the proliferation of contradictory expectations can create stress for young women. Stress and poor strategies for coping with stress have been cited as key components in the development of anorexia nervosa and other eating disorders. Thus, advertising may play an indirect role in creating eating disorders, among young women faced with new social roles and adult identities, by portraying conflicting perceptions of what appropriate roles should be (Faber & Wright-Isak, 1997).

Using social comparison theory as a framework, Martin and Gentry (1997) found one of advertising's "unintended effects" is the impact highly attractive models have on female pre-adolescents and adolescents. They report that young girls compare their physical attractiveness with that of advertising models and, subsequently, their self-perceptions and self-esteem may be affected, depending on the motive for social comparison.

It is believed that the "thin ideal" is particularly amplified in advertising, fashion and beauty magazines, and television progamming where body image and attractiveness are heavily emphasized in message images and conte . (Myers & Biocca, 1992; Harrison & Cantor, 1997). Downs and Harrison (1985) noted that 25 percent of network television commercials used "attractiveness-based messages," which they defined as those that make explicit or indirect promises of beauty or thinness.

More emphasis on attractiveness appears to be directed at women than at men. Silverstein, et al. (1986), for example, reported that women in television shows, magazine advertisements, and movies were more likely to be "thin" than their male counterparts. They also found that women's magazines were much more likely to run ads for diet food and figure-enhancing products than men's magazines.

Evans, Rutberg, Sather and Turner (1991) have argued that magazines have a significant role in the perpetuation of the stereotypical "thin ideal," particularly among teenage readers. Evans et al. suggest that magazines play an important role in adolescent socialization, and in the development of values and "identity achievement." They reported:

> Articles and advertisements mutually reinforced an underlying value that the road to happiness is attracting males for a successful heterosexual life by way of physical beautification (p.110).

The hypothesized link between exposure to magazine content and internalization of the "thin ideal" becomes all the more important given Smith's (1985) findings that anorectics are significantly more media conscious and more influenced by media on body images than non anorectics. Levine and Smolak (1996) also confirm this:

> ...it is quite common for patients with anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa to recall that models in fashion magazines have been a source of motivation and guidance in their quest for slenderness and self control (p. 237).

It is generally believed that adolescent women, anorectics in particular, use these media and sociocultural messages to create an internalized "ideal body," and then make it their goal to match this shape. "It is reasonable to imagine," write Myers and Biocca (1992), "that each of these body messages is just one strike of a chisel in sculpting the ideal body image inside a young woman's mind (p.111)."

Several other studies have attempted to establish theoretical links between exposure to images and messages about the "thin ideal" and eating disorder behavior. Anderson and DiDomeico (1992) have suggested a "dose-response" relationship. They found that greater exposure to thinness-promoting media images is associated with greater levels of disordered thinking. Harrison and Cantor (1997) reported statistically significant relationships between reading fashion magazines and reported "body dissatisfaction" as well as between reading health and fitness magazines and a "drive for thinness."

Smolak and Striegel-Moore (1996) have suggested that dieting serves as the starting point that initiates a number of maladaptive eating practices that can continue thoughout the lifetime of many women. The onset of an eating disorder typically occurs during the period of early adolescence or early adulthood, when these young women are likely to be influenced by the mass

BEST C... ...ABLE

media and susceptible to cultural pressures to be thin (Striegel-Moore, 1996; Polivy & Herman, 1987). In their longitudinal study of college-age women dieters, Heatherton et al. (1997) found that one in five who met the clinical criteria for an eating disorder in college continued to meet that criteria 10 years later.

The Current Study's Research Questions

This study seeks to investigate how college-age women, with potentially different eating attitudes and practices, rank advertisements that feature stereotypes promoting slimness and dieting in comparison to other harmful female stereotypes. The purpose is to explore the following research questions among a sample of female college students:

RQ1. Of the female stereotypes commonly used in advertising which ones are perceived to be the most harmful?

RQ 2. Specifically, are magazine advertisements that perpetuate the "thin ideal" perceived as more or less harmful than other female stereotypes?

RQ 3. Does the ranking of advertising female stereotypes differ by either the subject's possible presence of anorectic cognitions, body anxiety or dieting behavior?

RQ 4. Which female stereotypes are considered the most harmful to women's "health?"

RQ 5. Are any of the advertising campaigns that feature female stereotypes considered to be unethical?

Methodology

The data for this exploratory study were collected via Q methodology and a four-part questionnaire that was administered after each subject's Q sort of 40 magazine advertisements featuring harmful female stereotypes. Each Q sort and survey interview took about one and a half hours to complete. A convenience sample of 30 female undergraduate students, between 18 and 27 years old, was recruited from several large general studies classes at a mid-sized Midwestern university. College-age women have been identified as one of the highest at-risk groups for the development of eating disorders (Connors, 1996).

The researchers along with the help of students and graduate assistants initially collected a

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

pool of 60 advertisements which featured female stereotypes that could be considered harmful. Following three pre-tests, the number of ads in the final Q sort concourse was limited to 40 in order to reduce confusion and redundancy. Using the relevant literature (for example, Courtney & Lockeretz, 1971; Belkaoui, 1976; Dispenza, 1975; Kilbourne, 1987; Sullivan & O'Connor, 1988; Jaffe & Berger, 1994; Firth, 1995) as guidelines, the 40 ads were selected to represent 15 categories of potentially harmful female stereotypes (see appendix).

Q sort is a behavioral research technique that was introduced by William Stephenson (1953). This technique allows investigators to quantify subjectivity. Each subject in the study was asked to rank order each advertisement by placing it on a nine-point bipolar continuum ranging from "most harmful" (+4) to "least harmful" (-4). While each Q sort reflects each subject's own point-of-view regarding harmful female stereotypes, Q sort rankings are subsequently subjected to factor analysis which provides clusters of perceptions provided by subjects in the study. Investigators are most interested in the clusters or patterns of behavior which arise from the sorts, because those patterns present perspectives that are internal in nature, i.e., from the subject's standpoint. In contrast, R-factor analysis provides perspectives that are external in nature, i.e., from an observer's standpoint. And since Q methodology does not require large numbers of subjects, the investigators are content to talk about typical patterns of behavior found among female college students rather than the average college student's opinion of harmful female stereotypes in advertising. In dealing with subjectivity, there are no right or wrong answers, "since there is no outside criteria for a person's own point-of-view" (Brown, 1980). Further, the abductive nature of Q methodology allows the researcher to work toward a hypothesis, rather than from one.

Responses were computer tabulated using the QMETHOD factor analysis program, which is a public domain program available from Kent State University (Atkinson, 1992). One of the benefits of the QMETHOD program is the flexibility it allows investigators, if they wish, to compare and contrast hand rotated factors with computer generated factors. In order to determine if factors should be retained in the solution, at least two of the factor loadings, or personal correlations, on each factor must be significant at the .01 level. Factor loadings for this study were considered significant if they exceeded .408. This significant correlation was calculated from a formula for the standard error of a zero-order loading which is explained in Brown (1980).

QMETHOD also provided a descending array of advertisements and normalized z-scores on significant factors for all 40 ads. Scores above and below a z-score criteria of +/-1.0 for each factor were considered significant.

Following each Q sort a four-part survey was administered. The first step included a personal interview to better understand why respondents ranked the ads the way they did. The researchers probed why certain stereotypes were considered "most" and "least" harmful, and which ads were believed to be particularly harmful to women's health. Respondents were also asked questions concerning the ethicality of the advertising and purchase interest.

The next three steps involved a self-administered questionnaire:

1. Anorectic Cognitions. The survey instrument included the 33-item Mizes Anorectic Cognitions Scale (MAC). Permission was obtained from its author to use this scale, which assesses congnitions relevant to anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. According to its author, the MAC scale assesses three areas: rigid weight and eating regulation, weight and eating behavior as the basis of approval from others, and excessive self-control as a component of self-esteem (Mizes, 1990,1992). Mizes (1990) reported that high MAC scorers have a greater general empahsis on weight regulation, were more likely than control groups to rate higher various benefits of losing or maintaining weight, use more calorie restriction strategies, and, to a lesser extent, use more strategies to increase real or presumed calorie expenditure.

2. Body Anxiety and Weight Assessment. Body anxiety for this study was measured by listing seven body areas (busts, thighs, buttocks, hips, abdomen, legs and waist) and overall weight, and then asking the respondents to indicate by using a 5-point scale (0=never, 1-rarely, 2=sometimes, 3=often, 4=almost always) how anxious, tense or nervous they feel about that specific body area/part. The final body anxiety score was produced by summing the scores of the eight individual items. This approach was adapted from the Physical Trait Anxiety Scale, a fairly standard and widely-used measure of how an individual feels about specific parts of her appearance. To obtain an overall weight assessment, each respondent was asked to respond to a 6-point scale (1=underweight to 6=15 or more pounds overweight) that indicated her perception of her overall body weight. Given that even the most emaciated anorectics claim they feel fat, we were interested in the respondents' perceptions of the weight, and not the actual weights.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

3. Dieting Behavior. Finally, each respondent was asked to indicate whether she had dieted "at least once in the past six months" and whether she was currently on a diet.

Results

Results from the three-part, self-administered-questionnaire concerning anorectic cognitions, body anxiety and dieting behavior were analyzed to classify sample subjects' likelihood of developing an eating disorder as: "higher risk" and "lower risk."

Anorectic Cognitions. The Mizes Anorectic Cognition Scale produces scores that range from 33 to 165. Higher scores indicate a greater presence of anorectic cognitions and a greater potential risk for the development of an eating disorder. Mizes has reported that the mean score for test groups, whose members were previously diagnosed as having anorexia nervosa according to American Psychological Association DSM-III-R criteria, was 115.6 (SD=14.7). Control groups, consisting of healthy populations, have produced a baseline mean score of 65.1 (SD=12.3).

For this study, any college-age female with a Mizes score (TotMac) of 80 or above was classified as "higher risk" and those under a score of 80 as "lower risk." This level was selected because it represents slightly more than one standard deviation above the mean for healthy populations and slightly above the midpoint of the possible range of scores. The findings identified 10 women as higher risk and 20 women as lower risk.

Body Anxiety & Weight Assessment. The overall body anxiety measure produces scores that range from 0 to 32, with higher scores indicating greater levels of anxiety. The mean score for the sample was 19, which is consistent with modest levels of anxiety. Thirteen women with scores of 20 or above were classified as "higher risk" and 17 women with scores under 20 were identified as "lower risk."

Dieting Behavior. One half the sample, 15 women, indicated that they had dieted at least once in the past six months. One in five (20%) said they were currently on a diet.

Overall, the findings revealed that eight women (26%) scored as higher risk on all three screening measures (see Table 1.) These eight subjects represent the total sample's "higher risk" population versus the other 22 "lower risk" women.

Table 1: Subjects' Higher Risk Scores

Subject #	Total Mac	Total Anxiety	Diet-6mos.
1	81	24	yes
2	120	28	yes
5	84	23	yes
6	84	32	yes
7	86	24	yes
16	86	20	yes
17	90	27	yes
30	96	28	yes

In the initial analysis of the Q sort results, factor rotations indicated that a three-factor solution might be appropriate for interpretation. Each of the three factors had an eigenvalue accumulation of over 1.0; however, only one of the factors met investigators' minimum test of two significant correlations on a given factor. A two factor solution produced an exceedingly high correlation between each factor of .700, which made it difficult to identify distinguishing characteristics between each factor. The investigators chose to accept a one-factor solution because it presented a clearer picture of how women in the sample ranked all "harmful female stereotypes" featured in the advertisements, which was one of the research questions. Accepting the one factor solution did not limit the abililty of the investigators to evaluate if "higher" or "lower" risk females ranked the stereotypes in significantly different ways. Investigators were able to assess if the knowledge of high or low risk women might add to the interpretation of the two and three factor solutions, but in each solution it was clear that the knowledge of low and high risk subjects was not related to how they evaluated the stereotypes in this exploratory study.

Analysis of the 30 female college student sorts identified nine of the 40 advertisements/ stereotypes as "most harmful" (i.e. all nine ads had a z-score of 1.0 or higher). Five of the nine most harmful stereotypes portrayed women as sexual objects. Other stereotypes showed women as submissive to men, obsessed with men, helpless, frivolous and dumb blondes (see Table 2).

Only two ads featured a "thin ideal" model, Kate Moss. However, based on the respondents' comments, the strong reaction to these two ads was due more to showing Kate

Moss's bare breasts than to her thinness. They considered her as being depicted as a sexual object rather than an ideal body shape. None of the other six ads that featured the super "thin ideal" body shape or promoted dieting as a means to success were ranked as "most harmful." Apparently, respondents did not readily perceive the dangerous health effects of these messages. This may reflect these women's acceptance and internalization of the "thin ideal" as a social-cultural norm.

Table 2: Most Harmful Female Stereotypes with Significant Z-scores*

No.	Advertisement/Stereotype	z-score
18	Adam's Boots, woman licking floor/submissive to men	1.826
22	Express Jeans, close shot of woman's butt/sexual object	1.486
5	Miller Lite, man helping tie bikini top/helpless	1.448
26	Obsession, Kate Moss nude breast/sexual object (thin ideal)	1.400
10	CK Jeans, Kate Moss nude breasts/sexual object (thin ideal)	1.392
24	Candies Shoes, Jenny McCarthy on toilet/frivolous, dumb blonde	1.361
6	Miller Lite, six blondes on beach "find the bottle"/sexual object	1.284
8	Collezione-Carlo Jeans, women with hands down guy's pants/obsessed with men	1.193
1	Yes Clothing,man feeds scantily clad woman a cherry/sexual object	1.103

* See appendix for all Typal Z-Scores and Ad Descriptions.

A personal interview was conducted following each Q sort to better understand how the respondents ranked the ads. Some of the students' verbatim comments concerning why they ranked the advertisements noted in Table 2 as the "most harmful" include:

- " It's very demeaning to women."
- "It's disgusting because it degrades women."
- "Showing her breast has nothing to do with the product."
- "It seems silly that she needs someone to help her."
- "Selling sex is just inappropriate."
- "It's saying you need to look like this to get a man."
- "Kate Moss is anorexic and looks like she's on drugs."
- "There are kids that could be looking at these images."
- "This is typical fantasy, sexual object stuff."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Out of the 40 advertisements featuring female stereotypes, the students indentified seven as the "least harmful" (see Table 3).

Two ads, Ruffies trash bags and Gladlock zipper bags, portray elderly women as having no taste and as being dingalings. Another two ads for Whirlpool and Quaker show mothers as superwomen. Two more ads portray mothers as simple housewives. And one ad for Motherhood Maternity features a pregnant woman pondering her appearance. Interestingly, the respondents didn't perceive the dangers of ridiculing the elderly, or creating anxiety among working women and mothers by portraying them to be perfect at all times.

Table 3. Least Harmful Female Stereotypes with Significant Z-scores

No.	Advertisement/Stereotype	z-score
28	Ruffies trash bags, older woman in silly costume/elderly no taste, dingalings	-1.032
29	Gladlock zipper bags, older woman in silly costume/elderly no taste, dingalings	-1.129
14	Whirlpool, how to make a home run/superwoman	-1.376
27	Quaker, moms who have love but no time/superwoman	-1.642
11	Motherhood Maternity, pregnant woman in panties/concern over appearance	-1.655
13	Columbia, mother and sick child/simple housewife	-1.667
12	Jiff, mother and child with sandwich/simple housewife	-1.764

Some additional comments made during the student interviews help explain why the stereotypes noted in Table 3 were selected as "least harmful."

- "Even though the woman is older, it's not going to harm the whole gender."
- "I think it's funny, not derogatory."
- "It doesn't have an image women need to live up to."
- "I think it's helpful, inspirational."
- "It doesn't say you have to stay at home, but shows you care about your kids."
- "Being pregnant is beautiful. It has to do with the product."
- "The housewife image is getting old, but at least she's clothed."
- "It speaks to women's needs today."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Stereotypes Most Harmful to Women's Health

Following each Q sort and as part of the personal interview, respondents were asked which of the female stereotypes featured in the 40 advertisements were "most harmful" specifically to women's "health." This question prompted a different response to the ads and consequently it produced a different list of ads. Of the five most frequently mentioned ads, three ads featured diet programs. One ad promoted Liposculpture surgery as a means to a more desirable body shape. And a Virginia Slims ad showed a woman putting on mascara while driving a car at 55 mph. When the subject of women's health was directly related to stereotypes, the respondents perceived the inherent danger of ads promoting the "thin ideal." However, while the ads that explicitly promoted thinness by diet and surgery were regarded as harmful, other more implicit ads that featured ultra-thin models were not perceived as harmful.

Table 4. Top Five Ad/Stereotypes Harmful to Health

No.	Brand	Description	Stereotype
33	Body Maker	16-year-old girl learns how to be "foxy" thinner	dieting for sexual prowess
36	Dexatrim	woman resists chocolate cake	dieting for success
34	Liposculpture	before and after surgery pictures	slimness is beautiful
35	Slim Fast	before and after losing 50 lbs in six months	dieting for success
30	Virginia Slims	putting on mascara while driving 55 mph	frivolous, concerned with looks

Ethical Perceptions and Purchase Interest

Following the Q sorts, respondents were asked if they considered the advertisements they just ranked, "ethical" or "unethical." That is, do they believe any of the ads to be deceitful or harmful to anyone. They were also asked if any of these ads would stop them from buying the sponsoring brand.

There appears to be some correlation between the degree of respondents' perceived harmfulness and ethicalness of the advertisements. The findings indicate that 68% of the ads identified as most harmful were believed to be unethical. Only 5% of the ads ranked least harmful

were considered unethical. Furthermore, 83% of the sample said they would not buy brands that feature offensive, demeaning or harmful stereotypes in their advertising. The three advertisements that ranked the highest for reducing students' interest in buying the sponsoring brand were Adam's Boots which showed a woman licking the floor (submissive to men), Candies Shoes which featured Jenny McCarthy on a toilet (frivolous, dumb blonde), and Obsession Parfum which displayed Kate Moss's nude breast (sexual object).

Discussion

The findings of this Q study and related personal interviews concur with a number of previous studies. Consumers find advertising that uses shock tactics, including nudity and sexual explicitness, to be offensive and objectionable (Judd & Alexander, 1983; Burke & Edell, 1989; Gustafson, et al., 1995). Also, advertising that generates negative attitudes can adversely affect attitudes toward the sponsoring brand and reduce its sales (Burke & Edell, 1989; Walsh, 1994). Further, investigators learned that a large proportion, 68%, of advertisements deemed "most harmful" were considered to be unethical because of their potential harm to women.

While there is a growing body of research linking the readership of women's beauty, fashion and fitness magazines with eating-disordered thinking (for example, Harrison & Cantor, (1997), few studies have examined how advertising may contribute to eating disorders (Faber & Wright-Isak, 1997). In this study, investigators were able to separate a sample of college-age women into two groups using a self-administered questionnaire that screened for anorectic cognitions, body anxiety and dieting behavior. As a result, subjects were classified by their likelihood of developing an eating disorder as: "higher risk" and "lower risk." However, investigators did not observe any significant differences between high and low risk group Q sorts of ads featuring harmful female stereotypes.

A one-factor solution of Q sorts was accepted because it presented a clearer picture of how female college students ranked harmful female stereotypes featured in magazine advertisments. Nine of the 40 advertisements/stereotypes were identified as "most harmful." Five of the nine stereotypes explicitly portrayed women as sexual objects. Other stereotypes blatantly depicted women as submissive to men, obsessed with men, helpless, frivolous and dumb blondes. While

the respondents reacted strongly toward these explict images, they were far less inclined to react to the more implicit images (utlra-thin models) promoting the "thin ideal." In fact, none of the purely "thin ideal" images were ranked as most harmful by female college students.

Following the Q sorts, when the women subjects were asked to identify those stereotypes most harmful to women's "health" they focused on five ads. Three ads featured dieting programs as a means to looking sexy and being successful. One ad promoted Liposculpture surgery as a way to create a new body shape. In this instance, the respondents reacted most strongly to the explicit promotion of the thin ideal as they now recognized the danger of excessive weight loss to gain more desirable body shape. Again, however, none of the more implicit thin ideal ads which featured ultra-slim models were singled out as being harmful.

These findings support the notion that women are accustomed to seeing ultra-thin fashion models, and they do not readily perceive the danger in this stereotypical portrayal of beauty and success. While there are many female stereotypes used in advertising that are irritating, offensive and demeaning, none is potentially more dangerous than the "thin ideal." Using social comparison theory as a framework, Martin and Gentry (1997) found one of advertising's "unintended effects" is the impact highly attractive models have on female pre-adolescents and adolescents. They found that young girls compare their physical attractiveness with that of the models and their self-esteem may be affected depending on the motive for comparison. Other studies have shown this stereotypical portrayal, which often goes unnoticed by women, may contribute to eating disorders (Myers & Biocca, 1992; Stice, et al., 1994). This study also seems to support that the "thin ideal" is often overlooked or accepted as a social-cultural norm by female college students.

Lastly, it is interesting to note that six of the seven stereotypes identified as "least harmful" featured elderly women as dingalings and mothers as either superwomen or simple housewives. This sample of college-age women didn't perceive the dangers of ridiculing the elderly, or creating anxiety among working women and mothers. This is likely due to respondents' age and station in life.

Limitations and Future Research

As with all research, it is important to note the limitations of the methodology and scope of

this study. The convenience sample of female college students was drawn from a midwestern university which may bias some responses versus some other locales such as New York City or San Francisco.

The nature of Q methodology and time-intensive personal interviews limits the study's sample size. While the findings may not be projectable or representative of the population at large, they are indeed directional and representative of at least one view of harmful stereotypical ads. While focus group investigators must rely on experience or a priori reasoning for their interpretations, the Q methdology allows investigators an opportunity to quantify subjectivity.

There is both the opportunity and need for more research that investigates the unintended effects of stereotypes in advertising. Future ethnographic research with actual diagnosed anorectic populations might help provide answers to the question of whether some advertising contributes to the pathogenesis of anorectic thinking or if it becomes instrumental only after the onset of other affective, self-regulatory problems. The "thin ideal" is but one potentially harmful stereotype. In addition, there are many stereotypes that may affect women, elderly, ethnic groups, and other individuals. Every study should be treated as a welcome contribution.

Bibliography

About Face Web Site: www.about-face.org/

Andersen, A.E., DiDomenico, L. (1992), "Diet vs. shape content in popular male and female magazines: A dose-response relationship to the incidence of eating disorders?" *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 11 (3), P.283.

Atkinson, J. (1992), Q-METHOD, a public domain software program available for CAMS or VAX installations, which can be obtained on disk or by e-mail from Academic Computer Services, Kent State University, Kent, Ohio.

Belkaoui, A., Belkaoui, J.M. (1976), "A comparative analysis of the roles portrayed by women in print advertising: 1958, 1970, 1972," *Journal of Marketing Research* 13, p.170.

Brown, S.R. (1980), *Political subjectivity: Applications of Q-methodology in political science*, New Haven: Yale University Press, p.175.

Burke, M.C., Edell, J.A. (1989), "The impact of feelings on ad-based affect and cognition," *Journal of Marketing Research* 26, pp.69-83.

Connors, M.E. (1996), "Development vulnerabilities for eating disorders. In L. Smolak, M. Levine, R. Striegel-Moore eds. *The Developmental Psychopathology of Eating Disorders: Implications for Research, Prevention, and Treatment*, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, p.235.

Courtney, A.E., Lockeretz, S.W. (1971), "A woman's place: An analysis of the roles portrayed by women in magazine advertising," *Journal of Marketing Research* 8, p.94.

Courtney, A.E., Whipple, T.W. (1993), *Sex Stereotyping in Advertising*, Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, p.25.

Czajka-Narins, D.M., Parham, E.S. (1990), "Fear of fat: Attitudes toward society," *Nutrition Today*, January/February, p.26.

Dispenza, J.E. (1975), *Advertising to American Women*, Dayton, Oh: Pflaum Publishing, p. 236.

Downs, A.C., Harrison, S.K. (1985), "Embarrassing age spots or just plain ugly?" Physical attractiveness stereotyping as an intrument of sexism on American television commercials," *Sex Roles* 13 (1.2), p.9.

Evans, E.D., Rutberg, J., Sather, C., Turner, C. (1991), "Content analysis of contemporary teen magazines for adolescent females," *Youth and Society*, 23 (1), p.99.

Farber, R.J., Wright-Isak, C. (1997), "Advertising and eating disorders: A path less taken." Macklin, M.C. ed., *Proceedings of the Conference of the American Academy of Advertising*.

Ferguson, J.H., Kreshel, P.J., Tinkham, S.F. (1990), "In the pages of Ms.: Sex role portrayals of women in advertising," *Journal of Advertising*, 19, January, p.53.

Firth, K.T. (1995), "Advertising and mother nature," In *Feminism, Multiculturalism and the Media*, Valdivia, A.N. ed., London: Sage, p.188.

Garner, D.M., Garfinkel, P.E., Schwartz, D., Thompson, M. (1980), "Cultural expectations in thinness in women," *Psychological Reports*, 47, p.483.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Givens, R., (1993), "The ways we wanted to be!," *Working Woman*, November, p.66.

Gustafson, R., Yssel, J., Popovich, M. (1995), "A Q-sort Comparison of Generation X and Baby Boomers' Perceptions Toward Objectionable Advertising and Ethics," *Business Research Yearbook* Volume II, pp.105-109.

Harrison, K., Cantor, J. (1997), "The relationship between media consumption and eating disorders," *Journal of Communication*, 47 (1), p.40.

Heatherton, T.F., Mahamedi, F., Striepe, M., Field, A.E. (1997), "A 10-year longitudinal study of body weight, dieting, and eating disorder symptoms," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 106 (1), p.117.

Jaffe, L., Berger, P. (1994), "The effect of modern female sex role portrayals on advertising effectiveness," *Journal of Advertising Research*, July/August, p. 32.

Judd, B.J., Alexander, W.A. (1983), "On the reduced effectiveness of some sexually suggestive ads," *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 11 (2) pp. 156-168.

Kilbourne, J. (1987), *Still Killing Us Softly: Advertising's Image of Women*, Cambridge: Documentary Films.

Levine, M.P. Smolak, L., Hayden, H. (1994), "The relation of sociocultural factors to eating attitudes and behaviors among middle school girls," *Journal of Early Adolescence* 14 (4), P471.

Levine, M.P., Smolak, L. (1996), "Media as a context for the development of disordered eating," *The Developmental Psychopathology of Eating Disorders: Implications for Research, Prevention and Treatment*, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, p. 235.

Martin, C., Gentry, J.W. (1997), "Stuck in the model trap: The effects of beautiful models in ads on female pre-adolescents and adolescents," *Journal of Advertising*, 26 (2), p.19.

Millum, T. (1975), *Images of Woman*, Totowa NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, p.59.

Mizes, J.S. (1990), "Criterion-related validity of the anorectic cognitions questionnaire," *Additive Behaviors*, 15, p.153.

Mizes, J.S. (1992), "Validity of the Mizes Anorectic Cognition Scale: A comparison between anorectics, bulimics, and psychiatric controls," *Addictive Behaviors*, 17, p.283.

Myers, P.N., Biocca, F.A. (1992), "The elastic body image: The effect of television advertising and programming on body image distortions in young women," *Journal of Communication*, 42 (3), P.108.

Polivy, J., Herman, C.P. (1987), "Diagnosis and treatment of normal eating," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 55 (5), P635.

Silverstein, B., Perdue,L., Peterson, B., and Kelly, E. (1986), "The role of mass media in promoting a thin standard of bodily attractiveness for women," *Sex Roles*, 14 (9/10), p.519.

Smith, L.L. (1985), "Media images and the ideal body shapes: A perspective on women with an emphasis on anorectics," A paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Memphis, TN

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Smolak, L., Striegel-Moore, R. (1996), "The implication of developmental research for eating disorders," *The Developmental Psychopathology of Eating Disorders: Implications for Research, Prevention and Treatment*, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, p.235.

Solomon, B. (1992), "The 90s woman makes strides down Madison Avenue," *Management Review*, March, p.12.

Stephenson, W. (1953), *The Study of Behavior*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Stice, E., Schupak-Neuberg, E. Shaw, H. Stein, R. (1994), "Relation of media exposure to eating disorder symptomatology: An examination of mediating mechanisms," *Journal of Abnormal* Psychology, 103 (4), p.836.

Sulivan, G.L., O'Connor, P.J. (1988), "Women's role portrayals in magazine advertising: 1958-1983," *Sex Roles* 18, p.187.

Telford, A. (1997), "Sex in Advertising," *Communication Arts*, September/October, p.84.

Wadden, T., Brown, G., Foster, G., Linowitz, J. (1991), "Salience of weight-related worries in adolescent males and females," *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 10, p.407.

Walsh, D. (1994), "Safe Sex in Advertising," *American Demographics*, April, pp.24-29.

Zimmerman, J.S. (1997), "An image to heal," *The Humanist*, January/February, p.20.

Appendix

15 Categories of Potentially Harmful Female Stereotypes Used in Advertising

- Dumb Blonde, halfwits
- Helpless, indecisive
- Child-like
- Obsessed with men
- Submissive to men
- Sexual objects
- Slimness is beautiful/fashionable/attracts men
- Dieting for sexual prowess/success
- Interest in looking sexy
- Overly concerned with appearance
- Frivolous, superficial
- Superwoman-successful homemaker and businesswoman
- Simple housewife
- Elderly women--no taste in fashion
- Elderly women--zany, senile, dingalings

Magazine Advertisements Featuring Female Stereotypes

#	Brand	Description	Stereotype
1.	Yes Clothing	man feeds scantly dressed woman a cherry	sexual object
2.	Michael G Clothing	guy on motorcycle surrounded by women	objects worn by men
3.	Electric Beach	girl in bikini, "don't tease, torture them"	obsessed with men
4.	Miu Miu	woman in sweater without pants	child-like
5.	Miller Lite	man helping tie bikini top	helpless
6.	Miller Lite	six blondes on beach, "can you find the bottle?"	dumb blonde, sexual objects
7.	Fresh-up Gum	partially dressed woman & man in bed "the gum that goes squirt"	sexual object, submissive to men
8.	Collezione-Carlo Jeans	two women putting hands downs guy's pants	obsession with men
9.	Acne-Satin Kit	before and after acne treatment	concerned about appearance
10.	CK Jeans	model Kate Moss, nude top	slimness is fashionable
11.	Motherhood Maternity	pregnant woman in panties with belly exposed	concern over appearance
12.	Jif Peanut Butter	mother and child with sandwich	simple housewife
13.	Columbia Healthcare	mother and sick child	simple housewife
14.	Whirlpool	"How to make a home run"	superwoman
15.	Via TV Phone	mom & daughter picking clothes for date	obsessed with men
16.	Conair	"If this is your dream.. your hair"	vain, concerned with appearance
17.	Webster's Dictionary	woman can't spell commitment	dumb blonde
18.	Adam's Boots	woman licking floor	submissive to men
19.	Giorgio Armani	super slim model in suit	slim is fashionable
20.	LA Gear	woman looking at ier reflection in glass door and fantasizing	child-like

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Magazine Advertisements Featuring Female Stereotypes

#	Brand	Description	Stereotype
21.	Nicole Miller	super slim model in dress	slimness is fashionable
22.	Express Jeans	close shot of woman's butt in tight shorts	sexual object, body parts
23.	Guess Jeans	super slim model in jeans	slimness is fashionable
24.	Candies Shoes	Jenny McCarthy on toilet	dumb blonde
25.	Bisou Bisou	woman in evening gown breast feeding	sexual object
26.	Obsession Parfum	model Kate Moss nude breast	sexual object, body parts
27.	Quaker Oatmeal	moms who have love but no time	superwoman
28.	Ruffies	older woman with color scent trash bags	elderly-no taste, zany, dingalings
29.	Gladlock	older woman with zipper bag	elderly-no taste, zany, dingalings
30.	Virginia Slims	putting on mascara while driving 55 mph	frivolous, concerned with looks
31.	Virginia Slims	woman who owns 15 pairs of black shoes	superficial, indecisive, concerned with appearance
32.	Nail Fetish	woman fretting over her nail color	frivolous, indecisive, obsessed with men
33.	Body Maker	16-year-old girl learns how to be "foxy" thinner	dieting for sexual prowess
34.	Liposculpture	before and after surgery pictures	slimness is beautiful
35.	Slim Fast	before and after losing 50 lbs in six months	dieting for success
36.	Dexatrim	woman and chocolate cake	dieting for success
37.	CK Jeans	young, slim woman with ladder	child-like, sexual objects
38.	Lovable	woman in bra,"he'll start to beg"	obsessed with men
39.	Nancy Jones	body creme for beautiful bust	interest in being sexy
40.	Wonderbra	woman in bra, "double major"	interest in being sexy

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Ad Descriptions and Typal Z-Scores for Factor 1

Ad #	Description	Z-Score
18	Adam's Boots, woman licking floor	1.826
22	Express Jeans, woman's butt in tight shorts	1.486
5	Miller Lite, man tieing bikini top	1.448
26	Obsession, Kate Moss nude breast	1.400
10	CK Jeans, Kate Moss, nude breasts	1.392
24	Candies Shoes, Jenny McCarthy on toilet	1.361
6	Miller Lite, six blondes on beach, "find the bottle"	1.284
8	Collezione Jeans, women putting hands down guy's pants	1.193
1	Yes Clothing, man feeds scantily clad woman a cherry	1.103
39	Nancy Jones, body creme for beautiful bust	0.914
33	Body Maker, young girl learns how to be "foxy" thinner	0.829
2	Michael G Clothing, guy on motorcycle surrounded by women	0.651
21	Nicole Miller, super slim model in dress	0.394
3	Electric Beach, girl in bikini "don't tease, torture them"	0.220
34	Liposculpture, before and after surgery pictures	0.198
37	CK Jeans, young slim woman with ladder	0.186
4	Miu Miu, woman in sweater without pants	0.122
40	Wonderbra, woman in bra "double major"	0.117
38	Lovable, woman in bra "he'll start to beg"	0.100
32	Nail Fetish, woman fretting over her nail color	0.098
7	Fresh up Gum, "the gum that goes squirt"	-0.046
35	Slim Fast, before and after losing 50 lbs in six months	-0.222
36	Dexatrim, woman and chocolate cake	-0.252
17	Webster's Dictionary, woman can't spell commitment	-0.356
20	LA Gear, woman looking at reflection in glass door and fantasizing	-0.374
30	Virginia Slims, putting on mascara while driving 55 mph	-0.429
16	Conair, "If this is your dream...your hair"	-0.478
9	Acne-Satin Kit, before and after acne treatment	-0.495
25	Bisou Bisou, woman in evening gown breast feeding	-0.507
23	Guess Jeans, super slim model in jeans	-0.701
15	Via TV Phone, mom and daughter picking clothes for date	-0.840
19	Giorgio Armani, super slim model in suit	-0.881
28	Ruffies, older woman with color scent trash bags	-1.032
29	Gladlock, older woman with zipper bag	-1.129
14	Whirlpool, "how to make a home run"	-1.376
27	Quaker Oatmeal, "moms who have love, but no time"	-1.642
11	Motherhood Maternity, pregnant woman in panties, belly exposed	-1.655
13	Columbia Healthcare, mother and sick child	-1.667
12	Jif Peanut Butter, mother and child with sandwich	-1.764

BEST COPY AVAILABLE